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Thou Art in a Deal: The Evolution of Religious Language in the Public Communications of Donald Trump

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When Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign, his candidacy was far from embraced by the Religious Right. Yet, on election night, many of that same constituency turned out in overwhelming support: Trump gained a higher percentage of the White Evangelical vote than any prior nominee. Two years into his presidency, they remained his most loyal supporters. Using content analysis of 175 Trump rally speeches during the 2016 campaign and since becoming president and an archive of 30,000 tweets from Trump, this research finds evidence to solve a part of this puzzle. Trump appears to use his public communications as opportunities to alleviate the likely cognitive dissonance felt by these supporters, using religious language and explicit mentions of (the Christian) God in both tweets and speeches, helping to afford a biblically consonant interpretation of his presidency. He also proximates Christian religious language with concepts of Americanness, while proximating Islam almost exclusively with terrorism, perhaps linguistically delivering on promises of a Christian nation(alism).

Keywords: Trump, religion, U.S. presidential communication, speeches, tweets

Despite the vaunted "separation of church and state," the United States is a Christian country, invariably led by a Christian president.[2] Although formal religious affiliation among the population has dropped in recent years (Hout & Fischer, 2002, Christianity still dominates socially and politically. The 116th Congress is more than 88% Christian, and surveys consistently show that not being Christian would harm a candidate's chances for high office, particularly the presidency, and more so for Republican candidates. Since the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, U.S. voters have increasingly split along religious lines; White Evangelicals and Mormons overwhelmingly vote Republican, and Black Protestants and non-Christians tend to vote Democrat. In a Pew survey conducted in January 2016, two thirds of Republicans said it was important that a president share their (almost exclusively Christian) beliefs (Pew Research Center, 2016b). That same poll showed that only 30% of adults believed then-candidate Donald Trump to be "very" (5%)

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[1] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who rightly pushed to help improve this work. I must also acknowledge the work done by Kevin Coe, David Domke and Rod Hart in developing the religious n-grams.
[2] There is some debate as to the religious affiliations of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson while in office.

or "somewhat" (25%) religious, the lowest figures of any candidate in the poll; Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Ben Carson all scored more than twice Trump's figure of 30%, and Trump was described as "not religious" by five times more people than any of those competitors. At that same time, a *Christianity Today* poll (Smietana, 2016) found that just 5% of Protestant pastors who identified as Republican supported Trump in the primary elections.

Yet, as his campaign prospered and he moved from being a primary candidate to the Republican Party nominee to president, he did gain and crucially has maintained the support of many in the Christian faith, particularly White Evangelicals. A Public Religion Research Institute survey (Jones, 2018) in January 2016 found that just 49% of these voters supported candidate Trump. By September, nominee Trump had a favorability rating among this group of 61%. In November 2016, 81% of them turned out to vote for Trump. Pew presidential support tracking (Pew Research Center, 2017) did show a decrease in White Evangelical approval from 78% in February 2017 to 61% in December 2017, but those figures still doubled the commensurate figures for all survey respondents and were comfortably above figures for mainline Protestants and Catholics.

This is somewhat perplexing given what is believed about Trump's personal level of religiosity. Sociologists of religion, such as Putnam and Campbell (2010), often use variations of the three *B*s—Belief, Belonging, and Behavior—to measure personal religiosity. Trump has stated on several occasions, including in the data examined here, that he believes in God (to be specific, he is referring to the Judeo-Christian God of Yahweh) and identifies as a Presbyterian Christian. There is no reason to dispute this assertion. Political scientist David Innes remarks that Trump's religion "seems to be a sincerely held, vague, nominal, but respectful form of old-school Protestantism" (Murphy-Gill, 2017, para. 50). However, commonly used measures of belonging and behavior perhaps do not indicate high levels of religiosity. Early in the campaign, Trump stated that he was a member of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York; this was confirmed by the church, but the statement described him as "not an active member" (Scott, 2015). Since taking office, he has not been a regular attendee at any church (Lee, 2017; Nussbaum, 2017). With a history of, for example, three marriages and documented extramarital affairs, it would be somewhat charitable to describe him as a model of Christian behavior. However, some supporters have argued that he is improving this side of his life. During the presidential campaign, Evangelical leader James Dobson referred to Trump as a "baby Christian" (Gabriel & Luo, 2016), arguing that Trump's personal Christianity is developing. Dobson has continued his support of Trump during his presidency, as have other prominent Evangelical leaders.

It may well be the case that Trump is finding his faith, but even his most ardent supporters may be surprised to read that Hughes (2019) found that major public addresses by Trump contain religious language at a higher rate than any president from the preceding 100 years. Hughes' analysis of 448 major public addresses from Franklin Roosevelt forward found that Trump uses both general "religious terms" and explicit terms evoking God ("God terms") at a significantly higher rate than all of his predecessors. This is argued to be evidence of an example of strategic utilization of religious rhetoric within the political sphere. My current work continues this field of study to examine in more detail how Trump may be strategically using religious language in other prominent public communications.

Given the loyalty of White Evangelicals to the Republican Party, their typically high propensity to turn out at election time, and above-average levels of political engagement, their importance to the Trump campaign and subsequent presidency is clear. A "constituency logic" (Kitschelt, 1989) approach would necessarily be employed to appeal to this typically reliable section of the electorate. It is also clear that his campaign had serious work to do in early 2016 to convince this constituency to support him. Awkward attempts to follow such a logic were evidenced in Trump's claim in August 2015 that the Bible was his favorite book (despite then not being able to name a favorite verse) and his appearance at Liberty University during the early primary season (when he notably attempted to quote from "two Corinthians" rather than "second Corinthians"). Such early blunders in this area lessened as his campaign developed and professionalized.

Hart (1977) notes that on inauguration day, presidents are both sworn into office and ordained into an unofficial position of religious significance. Balmer (2008) details the contemporary role that God plays in the White House, a role that has steadily increased since Reagan (Coe & Domke, 2006) and is manifest in presidential speeches (Bailey & Lindholm, 2003) with the notably obligatory conclusion for God to bless the United States. It would be expected therefore that Trump would use religious language at a different rate in public communications in different periods of his political evolution: the period prior to launching his campaign indicative of a natural level of usage, followed by an increase in early campaign efforts in the primary season, and even higher during the general election, with this level maintained during the presidency. Also, as his campaign developed, more of the devout Christian constituency was required to reconcile the knowledge that Trump was likely not a devout Christian with the knowledge that he was the man they would soon have to vote for (and later continue supporting). Central to many Evangelical concerns in 2016 were the issues of abortion, "traditional" marriage, and religious freedom, a list that Trump was seemingly prepared to deliver on; yet, to potentially achieve these required accepting a man with dubious Christian credentials and, in fact, fairly well-documented un-Christian history (as exampled above), an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance. Motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990) posits that people are surprisingly good at interpreting evidence to support the conclusion they want to reach rather than a conclusion that objectivity favors. However, this is easier to do when evidence is proffered and given credibility. In this case, White Evangelical voters were likely looking for reasons to interpret Trump as a Christian as a part of their in-group. There is evidence to suggest that in his public communications, Trump helped do some of the work to afford this reasoning.

This work finds that Trump does appear to use religious language in a strategic manner in two central ways. First, Trump's increasing level of use of Christian religious language helps afford an interpretation of him as a Christian individual: His use of this language likely helps (particularly White Evangelical) supporters make peace with their support for him. Second, this language is employed as an aid to the populist trope of "othering": (Christian) religious language is commonly proximate with concepts of "Americanness," whereas words associated with Islam are proximate with concepts of radicalism and terrorism. This work helped White Evangelicals accept the deal that to deliver their political aims they would have to embrace a man they could interpret as devout enough for their purposes.

Religiosity, Nationalism, and Trump

Trump's politics and campaigns are typically labeled "populist," and although there is not one agreed definition as to what defines populism, or what are necessary and sufficient conditions to label something as populist, useful typologies have been created. Jagers and Walgrave (2007) argue that "complete populism" consists of three facets. First, populists make appeals deliberately to "ordinary," "working" people. Second, and often closely related to the first facet, populists criticize extant elite power structures within the society, typically the current government and/or established parties, but also elite societal structures outside politics such as media or judiciary. Third is "othering" in which lines of demarcation are established between an in-group and an out-group. This can be done by stressing who is seen as part of the in-group and/or who is part of the out-group. Populism and nationalism are related, yet distinct concepts, one central differentiator being the centering of populism around the nodal points of "people" and "elites," whereas nationalism focuses on the nodal point of the nation (i.e., some sovereign community in a certain space; de Cleen, 2017). The third trope of complete populism—othering—in this context relates to Christian nationalism (Gorski, 2010), that is, the notion that Christian Americans are the in-group, and that America is, and should remain, a Christian country. A 2018 poll (Najle & Jones, 2019) found that 73% of Republicans think that believing in (a Christian) God is somewhat or very important to be "truly American." Trump has frequently boasted an "America First" agenda, recently being happy to accept the label of "nationalist" (Baker, 2018). Whitehead, Perry, and Baker (2018) found that adherence to Christian nationalist ideology was associated with voting for Trump even when numerous controls, such as political ideology and sociodemographics, were included.

Religious language and tropes have been used previously to establish an in-group set against an explicit out-group. Reagan famously evoked Christian scripture to describe the United States as the "shining city on a hill" in conflict with the evil of the atheistic Soviet Empire. Following the September 11 attacks, George W. Bush evoked a similar biblical metaphor of the United States as a "beacon" in contrast to the Islamic terrorist threat. Trump, following Bush, established the out-group as Islam in general. It is known, without systematic investigation, that Trump frequently discusses Islam in relation to terrorism. Prior to running for office, he was frequently publicly critical of President Obama's refusal to use the terms *radical Islam* and *Islamic terrorism*. Trump's presidency began with his controversial Executive Order 13769—commonly referred to as the "Muslim ban"—something Trump had explicitly called for in 2015. Immediately this signaled to supporters that this White House was prepared to position Muslims as an out-group and an out-group linked to terrorism. Although this linking was manifest in many of Trump's statements, it is still worth examining this in detail and quantifying the extent of the connection made.

Method

The two main modes of address used by Trump for campaign communications are his prolific use of Twitter and his speeches given at rallies. Concentrating on these allows for comparisons of pre-, during, and post-2016 campaign communications. Tweeting certainly did not cease following his assuming the presidency, and neither did the rallies; only a month after inauguration, Trump returned to giving large rallies on a "thank you" tour.

Rally Speeches

To ensure consistency of the type of speech across the periods of interest, I examined only campaign rally speeches. These were operationalized as the part of campaign events when Trump spoke in front of a large audience made up generally of supporters, with the main purpose of engendering support from the crowd, and when Trump was the lone (or almost lone) speaker. A listing of such speeches was established using information from the Trump campaign plus media reports of events. Most rallies occurred during the 2016 presidential campaign; 15 took place during the primary season, 126 when Trump was the Republican nominee. A further 34 took place between Trump becoming president and the midterm elections in November 2018. Although several rallies held in summer and fall of 2018 were ostensibly in support of local candidates ahead of the midterms, these were included as they were essentially Trump rallies with his speech the dominant feature of the event.

No one source had a complete archive of speech transcripts; therefore, as done by Chapp and Coe (2019), I constructed an archive using several sources to complete a full corpus. Transcripts of speeches in the rally archive came from four sources: the presidency archive (https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu; Peters & Woolley, 2018), closed-captioning transcripts available from C-SPAN (https://www.c-span.org), the archiving site Factbase (https://factba.se/trump), and transcriptions undertaken of rally videos downloaded from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com).

Transcripts were checked for presence of other non-Trump voices and these were removed. At times, Trump invited family, prominent supporters, and fellow Republican politicians to speak. There were numerous instances of audience chants; these were also removed from transcripts.

Speeches were classified into three temporal groups: Candidate Trump (rallies during the primary election period), Nominee Trump (rallies after he became the official Republican nominee), and President Trump (rallies after he became president). These periods chosen as the demarcating events were all significant milestones that changed the political position of Trump from *a* Republican candidate to *the* Republican candidate to the president.

Tweets

A publicly available archive[3] of Trump tweets (from @realDonaldTrump) was downloaded. This archive contains all tweets made by Trump since he joined the platform in 2009. All original tweets up to November 7, 2017, were included, the date when the tweet character limit was changed from 140 to 280 characters (N = 30,282). This cutoff was made to facilitate valid trend comparisons. The Twitter API contains metadata that indicate which device was used to make each tweet. It is believed that Trump generally uses one mobile device to tweet, and tweets from other devices may be written by staffers, but this is not definitive.[4] In interviews, Trump has stated that he personally writes some and dictates others for staffers

[3] http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/archive

[4] In a 2017 First Amendment case, White House attorneys confirmed that Trump personally writes most of the tweets published under @realDonaldTrump.

to write, and it is understood that some are written by staffers. Hence, on the question of authorship, it is not possible to be completely sure whether a tweet came directly from Trump. Therefore, all tweets except retweets were included in the analysis. Speeches of course are also not written entirely by presidents, so the precise authorship of tweets, for the purposes of this research, is immaterial; as with speeches, they are presented as a communication from the person (and presidency) to the public.

Tweets were grouped into four periods: Citizen Trump, which covers from his first tweet (April 5, 2009) to the point he formally declared his candidacy (June 16, 2015); Candidate Trump is the following period until he officially became the Republican nominee (July 22, 2016); Nominee Trump is from that point until he was sworn into office (January 20, 2017); and President Trump covers the first 10 months of office until the Twitter character limit was changed (November 7, 2017).

Religious Language

Coe and Domke (2006) established a set of words or phrases (hereafter "n-grams") for coding both explicit references to God ("God terms") and words related to a construct of religion ("faith terms"). These two categories combined form "religious terms." Their listing of terms was adapted from Hart and Childers (2005), who define their listing as "religious terms (n = 200)—broad-based, Judeo-Christian terminology, including value-laden terms, religious personalities, and theological constructs" (p. 186). Hughes (2019) adapted the Coe and Domke list, slightly reducing the number of faith terms to establish a set of Christian religion n-grams consisting of 103 "faith terms" and nine "God terms"; this list is used in this work (see Appendix Table A1 for the full list). Each speech or tweet was checked using the word-processing program Notepad++ for the presence of any of the religious n-grams and the number of faith and God terms recorded. A token approach was used in which all instances of faith and God terms were converted to the tokens FAITHTERM and GODTERM with RELIGIOUSTERM being used as an umbrella token for both. N-grams were converted to tokens using a simple find–replace command. Instances when words and stems/lemma could be miscategorized were checked manually. For example, He/Him/His were treated as God terms when appropriate, but all instances were checked manually as clearly these could have been used simply as the common male pronoun. The number of tokens present and total words were recorded for each individual speech, and tweets were grouped into the four periods of Twitter use. Two rate measures were used to provide a consistent metric of usage of religious language. Religious terms per thousand (RTPT) is the total number of religious words (faith n-grams plus God n-grams) divided by the total number of words in the text, and the quotient multiplied by 1,000. God terms per thousand (GTPT) uses the same formula.

Co-occurrence analysis was also undertaken on the texts to examine the language used by Trump around these religious terms and, separately, terms related to Islam. Such analysis provides reliable measures of what is being frequently discussed proximate to constructs of religion. Syntagmatic relations were recorded, with Jaccard's coefficient the precise metric used, set at a relatively strict window of ±10 words around the religious terms in speeches and on individual tweets that contained one or more religious n-grams. This analysis was supplemented with latent Dirichlet allocation topic modeling. These last analyses were undertaken using the software Wordstat.

Findings

Trump on Twitter

More than 30,000 tweets were made by Trump from May 2009 to November 2017, more than 1,800 of those since he took office. Although tweets by nature are short, the sheer volume of tweets makes it possible to glean reliable longitudinal analysis of the rate of usage of religious terms at different periods of Trump's Twitter use.

There were four periods of Twitter use demarcated as outlined above: Citizen Trump, Candidate Trump, Nominee Trump, and President Trump. Figure 1 illustrates the RTPT and GTPT across the four periods. There is a clear marked difference in the rate of use of religious language between President Trump and pre-President Trump. The RPTP saw a very slight increase from citizen to candidate to nominee, whereas GTPT slightly decreased, yet there was a large jump in both metrics for the presidency period. Overall, President Trump's RTPT is 3.2 and GTPT 0.60, approximately three times the commensurate figures for pre-President Trump of 1.2 and 0.19, respectively.

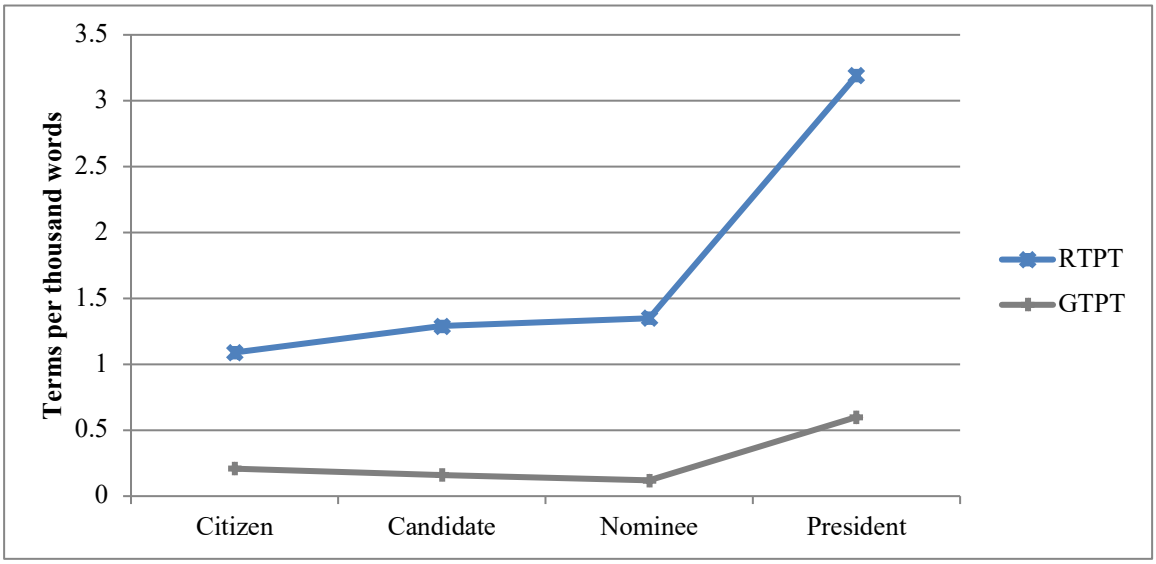

Figure 1. Rate of religious terms and God terms by period of Twitter use. RTPT = religious terms per thousand; GTPT = God terms per thousand.

Rally Speeches

This analysis can be largely repeated for Trump's use of such language during rally speeches. He did 15 rallies while a primary candidate, 126 while the Republican nominee, and 34 between becoming president and November 2018. A slightly different pattern to the Twitter data emerges. There was very little religious language during the primary season. The RTPT was 0.4 and GTPT 0.06 for candidate speeches. Most speeches at this time were almost or totally devoid of any specific God terms, just eight in total used

in all 15 speeches. Between the primary and general election campaigns, the rate of religious language increased more than threefold; the RTPT moved to 1.46, and GTPT to 0.32. The RTPT rate dropped slightly to 1.34 for presidential speeches, but the GTPT increased further to 0.40 (see Figure 2).

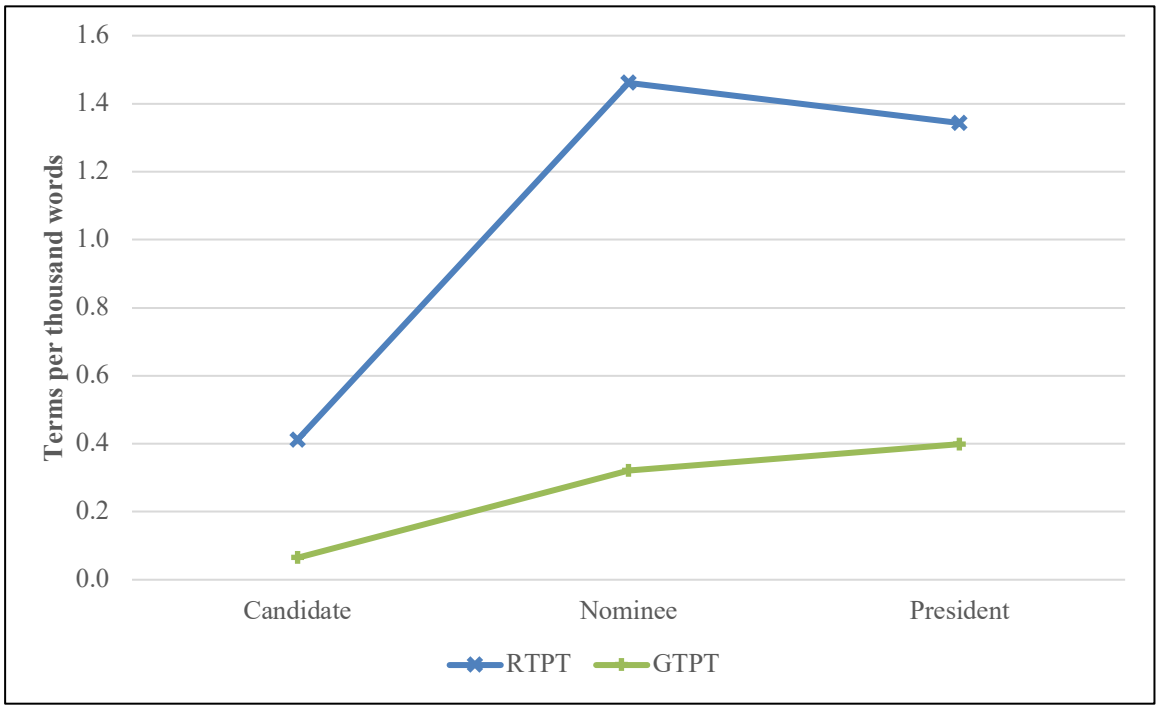

Figure 2. Rate of religious terms and God terms by period for all speeches (n = 175). RTPT = religious terms per thousand; GTPT = God terms per thousand.

In the candidate speeches, Trump used an average of 0.5 God terms per speech; this rose to 1.6 in nominee speeches and 3.2 in presidential speeches. Similarly, religious terms moved from an average of 3.4 per candidate speech to 7.2 in nominee and 10.7 in presidential speeches. This is the case even though candidate and president speeches were of similar length on average (nominee speeches were considerably shorter[5]). Part of this change could be explained by simple convention. Since its first use by President Reagan, there has been an established and almost obligatory conclusion to presidential addresses of variations of "God bless you," followed by an exhortation for God to "bless (the United States of) America" (it was widely noted that Trump was the first president-elect since Reagan to not use this conventional conclusion in his election victory speech). It is an accepted norm for presidential candidates, even in the primary period, to use the de rigueur closing remarks to appear presidential; Trump did not do this, whereas Clinton, Cruz, Rubio, Bush, and others routinely used the motif. Although Trump did not use this convention at all in candidate speeches, he did adopt variations of the form intermittently in the subsequent periods.

[5] The average word lengths of speeches were nominee, 4,948 words; candidate, 8,258 words; president, 7,966 words. The rate figures were, therefore, used to account for these differences in speech lengths.

Different stump speeches were used commonly during the campaigns, so there were often standard conclusions used in these speeches. Common concluding remarks were "under one God, saluting one American flag, thank you and God bless"; "God bless you everybody, God bless you, get out and vote"; and "We are one people, one family, and one glorious nation under God." The rise in rate of God terms, and to a lesser extent, religious terms generally, following the primary period can therefore be accounted for in part simply by the inclusion of a conventional conclusion to the speeches. However, the rise is higher than can be accounted for solely from just this convention. It could also be argued that presidential language from the same person is likely to contain higher religiosity simply because of the nature of the office; Hart (1977) argues that at an inauguration, presidents are also effectively ordained. But again, this seems like an incomplete argument to account for these data.

Even with the sharp increases in both metrics to a relatively high level during the presidential rally speeches, these rates are still well below the rates found by Hughes (2019) in the major public addresses given by Trump while president; in these, the RTPT rate was 7.3 and GTPT rate 1.4. Therefore, the president giving a presidential address to the nation used religious language at a much higher rate than that same president addressing a rally of supporters, in line with what Hart's (1977) work would predict.

These data combined illustrate that Trump moved from being a primary candidate with an unusually low level of religious language in his campaign speeches compared with his contemporaries and opponents, to be a president with the highest rate of religious language in major public addresses compared with his predecessors from the last 100 years. This is a marked change over a relatively short period of time, suggesting that the employment of such language may be strategic, and the change is driven by an exogenous influencing factor rather than a personal evolution.

The differences in patterns between the speech and Twitter trends are notable. The steep increase in rate happened later with Twitter than in speeches. A plausible explanation for this is that speechwriters during the campaign were perhaps responding to exhortations from the Evangelical leaders as they came on board the campaign. Also, as the campaign became increasingly professionalized and staffed with party operatives, this increasing expertise and knowledge would have likely promoted belief that the path to the White House required support from the devout Christian constituency, a force known to be loyal, vocal, and to contain many committed campaigners. Trump exerted far greater personal control over the content of tweets; therefore, it is reasonable to surmise that it may have taken longer for this practice to influence an individual whose natural level of religious-language tweeting had historically been very low.

Speeches by State

These data suggest that speech religiosity may vary because of a consideration of the audience of the speech. The nation as the audience is given a higher level of speech religiosity than the supporters at a rally. Of course, an orator changing the message dependent on audience is hardly a revelatory idea, and it must be acknowledged that those speech types are for very different purposes. However, such apparent strategic use of religious language perhaps adds further evidence to support assertions that Trump is prepared to use religion as an avenue to reach a needed constituency rather than its presence being reflective of personal conviction.

The high volume of rally speeches allows this possibility to be tested further while keeping the speech type and salient audience factors constant. To examine this, I examined levels of religious content of speeches with consideration of the states where the speech was delivered, checking whether perceptions of the likely religiosity of the audience altered the level of religiosity found in the speeches. Although it is not known whether attendees at rallies were representative of the wider state population, speech authors, including Trump, would have at the very least held some perception, consonant with general public opinion, about the audience's religiosity; it is reasonable to assume that they believed the audiences addressed in, for example, Mississippi and Texas would differ in this aspect from audiences in Maine and New Hampshire. To keep the type of speech as constant as possible, I included only the nominee rally speeches (n = 126). States were divided into quartiles based on the average level of personal religiosity in each state. Average personal religiosity was taken from the Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study (Lipka & Wormald, 2016), which lists states ordinally using the proportion of adults considered to be "highly religious." This classification is an index resulting from a four-question battery asking survey respondents about the importance of religion to them, their prayer frequency, church attendance, and level of belief in God (see Lipka & Wormald, 2016, for further details). The 50 states (plus the District of Colombia) were divided into almost equal quartiles. Some states were given the same ordinal number in the ranking; in these instances, they were kept in the same quartile. Therefore, the first (most religious) quartile contained 12 states, with subsequent quartiles containing 14, 12, and 13 states, respectively. The full listing of states by quartiles is in Appendix Table A2.

These data showed relatively small but significant ($p < .01$ for RTPT and $p < .1$ for GTPT) trends in the level of religious n-grams and God n-grams used as the level of religiosity by quartile increases. Linear trend lines are plotted in Figure 3. In the most religious states, Trump had a RTPT rate of 1.7 and a GTPT rate of 0.36. In the states with the least religious population, these figures dropped to 1.2 and 0.24, respectively (see Figure 3). These data provide further indicative evidence of deliberate usage of religious language.

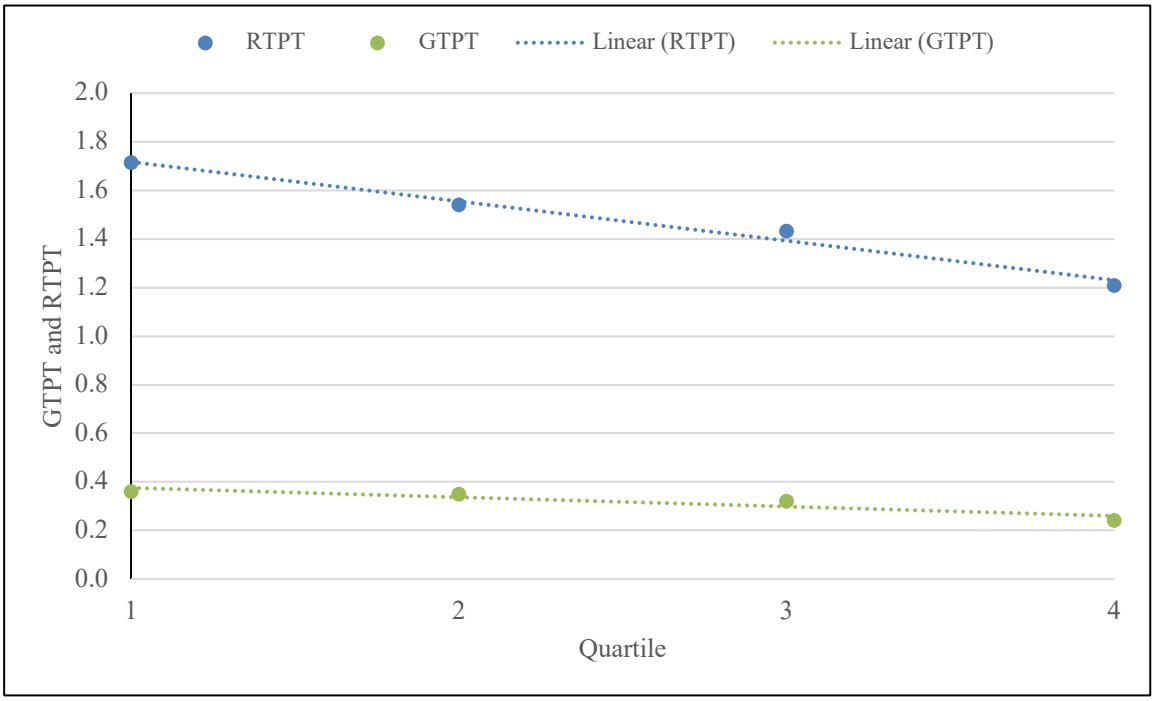

Figure 3. State religiosity by quartiles and rate of religious terms and God terms in nominee speeches (n = 126). RTPT = religious terms per thousand; GTPT = God terms per thousand.

One Christian Nation Under One Christian God

Thus far, the data have been examined for only the level of religious language found in speech texts. It is naturally of interest to examine in more depth where and how this language is employed. Large volumes of text, as in the case here, allow for study of what language is being frequently used as a guide to what subjects the author wishes to relate to religiosity. Such analysis is part of the linguistics field investigating patterning in texts, sometimes referred to as "combinatorics" (Partington, 1996). In this section, the speeches and tweets are not separated into time periods, but rather collective corpuses as co-occurrence analysis improves in validity with increases in quantity of text.

All instances of religious n-grams in the texts were converted to a token of RELIGIOUSTERM to facilitate use of the key word in context (KWIC) function in the natural language processing software Wordstat. KWIC was set to a narrow window of 10 words before and after the token in speeches and at the individual tweet level in the Twitter data, resulting in similar sized units of approximately, on average, 100 characters for both speech and tweet data. Table 1 provides a comparison of the most used terms in the full texts of speeches and tweets and the KWIC extracts. The standard exclusion dictionary was used in Wordstat; this is usual practice in such examinations as it removes words such as conjunctions and pronouns. Consistent terms between columns are shaded in Table 1.

Table 1. Top 10 Most Common Words in Full Texts of Speeches and All Tweets and Key Word in Context (KWIC) Extracts by Religious Terms.

Full texts (speeches)	KWIC – religiousword (speeches)	Full texts (tweets)	KWIC – religiousword (tweets)
People	People	Great	Great
Great	America	America	America
Country	Make	President	People
Hillary	Great	Make	Make
Make	Country	Hillary	Run
Jobs	Vote	People	Country
Clinton	American	Time	Thoughts
Good	Love	Run	Good
Years	Cities	Country	President
Win	Hillary	Vote	Time

Note. Consistent terms between columns are shaded.

The high ranking of *America* in the speech KWIC extracts is probably largely explained, as previously discussed, by the fairly standard conclusion of many presidential speeches of the exhortation for God to "bless America." Similarly, the campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" was a frequent conclusion to speeches, which explains the presence of *make* and *great*. That said, even though their presence is largely explained by convention, it is worth noting that the most prominent phrase of the campaigns is found in attendance with religious language. The tweet listings are almost identical. The prominence of *American* in the speech extracts is notable and not explained by the conventional conclusion, which specifically uses *America*.

A co-occurrence analysis was undertaken using Jaccard's coefficient to examine which words were frequently found in close collocation to the religious terms. A window of ±10 words was again used in speeches and at the individual tweet level to provide relatively strict measures of collocation. Given the calculation used to ascertain Jaccard's coefficient,[6] this method provides a more useful test to see what words were found in proximation to religious n-grams. Table 2 lists the top 10 words with the highest Jaccard's figure for all the speeches.

[6] Jaccard's coefficient is calculated as a/(a + b + c), where a represents cases where both items occur (e.g., a religious term and one of the words listed in the tables), and b and c represent cases when one item is found but not the other. Coefficient figures are expected to be generally low unless applied to very homogenous texts.

Table 2. Words With Highest Jaccard's Coefficients.

Faith term (speeches)	Faith term (tweets)	God term (speeches)	God term (tweets)	Religious term (speeches)	Religious term (tweets)
Cities	Thoughts	Saluting	Families	Cities	Thoughts
Liberty	Families	Flag	Disloyal	America	Families
Woman	America	Working	Life	American	America
Tender	People	Glorious	Victims	Make	People
Government	Victims	America	Attack	Liberty	Country
Honesty	Attack	Wealthy	Terrorist	Flag	Attack
America	Country	Nation	Enforcement	Vote	Victims
Supports	Great	Make	Killed	Government	Day
Kate	Day	Family	Government	Saluting	Great
Law	Mr	Woman	Macys	Woman	Good

Note. Consistent terms between columns are shaded.

Tables 1 and 2 show how frequently Trump collocates religious terms alongside concepts of Americanness (shaded) in speeches: the literal terms *America* and *American*, also *country*, *liberty*, *flag*, and *saluting*. Religious language in tweets appears to commonly be found around rhetoric related to attacks: *victims*, *attack*, *enforcement*, and *killed*. This is likely specifically related to mass shooting events and the standard "thoughts and prayers" response (Zhang et al., 2019), validated by the topic modeling on tweets (but not speeches) that returns a topic containing *thoughts*, *prayers*, *families*, *victims*, and *condolences*.

If this is repeated for a co-occurrence analysis around God terms, in the speech texts, similar words appear in high collocation: *saluting*, *flag*, *America*, and *nation*. This proximation does not happen with the tweet data. Speeches and tweets are of course very different forms of communication and comparing them should be undertaken with caution. One consideration that may in part explain the inconsistency in these data is that speech texts are generally more considered than tweets and afford greater opportunity for wordsmithing. This is perhaps again evidence of speechwriters having greater influence over employment of religious language.

The repeated proximation of religious terms with Americanness in speeches does linguistically place the two constructs as closely aligned: According to the words of the leader of the nation, Americanness and Christianness are closely related. This resonates with the work of Robert Bellah (1967) on civil religion, which argues that certain American icons become infused with similar power as religious totems. However, as argued by Gorski (2010, 2017), Christian nationalism is related to, but distinct from, Bellah's civil religion, and Trump typically evokes the former rather than the latter (Whitehead, Perry, and Baker, 2018).

An example of how Trump places these constructs is illustrated neatly in the following speech extract: "And I'm going to fight to bring us all together as Americans, imagine what our country could accomplish if we started working together as one people under one God saluting one American flag." Here he places the in-group of "Americans," "our country," and "one people" under the "one God." It is worth reiterating that when Trump refers to God, he clearly has in mind the Judeo-Christian concept of Yahweh, the God of the Christian Bible.

Consider the following campaign speech given by Trump in Indiana as an example:

> We are one people. We are one family. And we are one nation under God. And together we will make America wealthy again, we will make America strong again, we will make America safe again, and we will make America great again. (Council Bluffs, Iowa. October 9, 2018. Factbase, para. 142)

This passage evokes central tenets of Christian nationalism of a strong and safe country. If God is included under the collective "together we," God is part of the rebuilding process to make America wealthy, strong, safe, and great.

The "Other" Religion

An important component of Christian nationalism is othering of other religions (Gorski, 2017; Whitehead et al., 2018). This is evident in the language used by Trump in association with Islam; it is almost exclusively language connected to terrorism. The top words co-occurring with Islam terms are shown in Table 3. *Terror* and its derivatives clearly relate to the same concept and are therefore included both separately and under an umbrella category. Trump mentioned ISIS frequently, but this term is not included in the analysis given that, as a terrorist organization with Islam in the name, it would need to be included as both an Islam term and terror term. *Radical* is effectively connected to terror when found in proximity to Islam terms given its almost exclusive use in the context of "radical Islam/ Islamic terrorism" (although it was also occasionally used for "radical Democrats" and "radical socialism" in later speeches).

Table 3. Top 10 Words Collocated With Islam Terms.

Speeches		Tweets	
Word	Jaccard's coefficient	Word	Jaccard's coefficient
Radical	.569	Radical	.507
Terrorists	.303	Terror[a]	.178
Terror[a]	.295	Terrorism	.153
Terrorism	.159	Terrorists	.087
Program	.088	Terror	.071
Syrian	.076	Terrorist	.045
Hell	.051	Term	.038
Elected	.045	Smart	.038
Terror	.040	Threat	.038
Defeat	.038	Mention	.032

Note. Consistent terms between columns are shaded.
[a] Includes *terror*, *terrorist(s)*, and *terrorism.*

Given the formula used, a Jaccard's coefficient above .3 is extraordinarily high and very unusual. This is slightly mitigated given that much of these data, as mentioned previously, come from a limited number of iterations of stump speeches, which by nature would contain much of the same content. However, even with that caveat, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Trump only ever mentioned Islam in rally

speeches (and indeed tweets) within a context of terrorism. This finding is not a surprise as Trump's position in this area has been manifest, but the level of proximation of Islam terms and terror terms is perhaps still somewhat surprising. This is validated by the topic modeling analysis. In each speech period and in the full speech corpus, one of the top performing topics could be labeled "Islamic terrorism": a topic occurring in a remarkable 98% of speeches, a level consistent in each period. A very similar high-performing topic containing just three terms—*radical*, *terrorism*, and *Islamic*—is returned from the tweet corpus.[7]

Discussion

Previous presidential candidates have faced scrutiny with respect to their faith being compatible with the office they were seeking and have used public communications to attempt to reassure voters. The candidacy of Al Smith in the 1920s was perhaps fatally damaged by his Catholicism. Almost four decades later, John F. Kennedy worked hard to assure voters that he could separate his Catholic faith from his presidential duties. Jimmy Carter had to do the same with respect to his evangelicalism. The "wall" separating faith and office maintained by Kennedy and Carter was largely torn down by Reagan as the Christian Right became increasingly powerful within the GOP. Forty years after Kennedy's election, George W. Bush, an Evangelical Christian, placed his faith as a central component of his campaign and time in office, even establishing the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, thus completing the dismantling the wall. When Donald Trump began his presidential bid, famously arriving down a gold escalator in Trump Tower, he was received with little enthusiasm from most Christian leaders. As his path to becoming the Republican nominee seemed increasingly inevitable, many of those same leaders, particularly from the White Evangelical community, came on board in support; once he took office, they became some of his most vociferous supporters. Franklin Graham tweets almost daily in support; Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network has been called a de facto propaganda channel for the administration (Burton, 2018); and Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, and Paula White are other prominently vocal supporters. Of course, it is not unexpected for any Republican nominee to receive support from the White Evangelical community; since Reagan, there has been an increasing bifurcation in religious and political alignment. By 2016, this had settled to huge disparities being evident between political party support and religious affiliation. At the time Trump was elected, the Republicans had a strong advantage with members of almost all White Evangelical churches. Some mainline Christian churches were evenly divided between the parties, and the Democrats had a huge advantage with Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and secular communities, and members of historically Black churches (Lipka, 2016).

It is worth repeating a similar caution issued by Balmer (2008) in his analysis of the role of religion in presidential elections: It is not here argued that religious language necessarily played an important, let alone decisive, role in the 2016 presidential election. Some voters are single-issue voters, with social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage often particularly faith-led motivating factors in voting decisions. If a voter is strongly "prolife" or a vehement supporter of heteronormative families, the decision to vote Republican is easy, irrespective of who is on the ticket. According to the Pew Religious Landscape Study

[7] This topic includes the words *radicalism*, *extremism*, *terrorism*, *Islamic*, *terrorists*, and *radical*. Tweets were combined into three individual documents representing the three periods post-Citizen Trump. The parameters for both models were set for a 75-topic result with loading set to .4.

(Pew Research Center, 2016a), in 2014, 64% of Evangelicals opposed same-sex marriage and 55% believed that homosexuality should be discouraged. Trump is the last point on a trend line of increasing alignment between party and religion, certainly among Evangelicals. The rise of the Religious Right in the 1980s aligning the Republican Party with more ardent Christian denominations is well documented (see Lambert, 2008, chapter 7). The Pew (2016a) survey also found that 56% of Evangelicals identified as Republican in 2014, up from 50% in 2007.

These figures and this trend would seem to be able to explain much of the support for Trump among certain devout Christians. But it does not feel like a complete explanation. During the campaign and since becoming president, Trump has provided, *prima facie*, plenty of opportunity for the faithful to withdraw their support. The data here however also reveal that he appears to regularly give them reason to maintain their support. He perhaps plays part of the role required to motivate reasoning that Trump is religious enough for their purposes. He speaks and tweets to them with increasing religious language and explicit evocations of God. In his speeches, he aligns Americanness with Christianity, implicitly and explicitly supporting notions that America is one nation under one (Christian) God. He mentions the "other" religion of Islam almost exclusively to starkly illustrate the otherness of Islam as a religion he associates with terrorism. This deal is perhaps good enough to ignore the counterevidence about the religiosity of the man delivering these messages.

The changes of religiosity in nominee speeches significantly trending in direction with the level of religiosity in the state perhaps illustrate greater campaign organization and strategy than popularly believed. It may be that speech authors deliberately upped the religious content of the speeches when they felt it to be apposite. However, it is known that Trump frequently departs from prepared remarks (Wells et al., 2016); perhaps the additional religious language in states with high religiosity comes more from ad-libbed amendments by Trump. It was not possible to source an archive of complete speech scripts[8] to see how closely Trump stuck to prepared remarks. The data show that religiosity in tweets increased at a later period than the increase in speeches. There is also less evidence of their being used in a strategic manner. A plausible hypothesis for this is that the speeches during the campaign were identified by strategists as avenues to speak to religious voters and present a case for Trump's beliefs. The multiple authors who worked on them had an opportunity to include some religious content. It was only when in office that the rate of use of religious language in tweets increased sharply. Perhaps Trump heeded advice to alter this aspect of his tweeting, or perhaps communications staff write this specific language; as previously detailed, it is not possible to definitively differentiate tweets written by Trump from those authored by staff.

Another deal was perhaps reached between Trump and leaders of the White Evangelical community. In August 2018, Trump invited a large group of Evangelical pastors to dinner at the White House. He opened by thanking some of the most prominent attendees saying, "I know you, I watch you, I see you. Yours are the words we want to hear" ("Remarks by President Trump," 2018, para. 9). Concluding the address, he returned to thanking the attendees,

[8] Correspondence with the Presidency Archive in 2019 revealed that the archive is still waiting for such information from the Trump campaign.

> So, thank you again to all of my friends and faith leaders for being here tonight. You are really special people. The support you've given me has been incredible. But I really don't feel guilty because I have given you a lot back, just about everything I promised. ("Remarks by President Trump," 2018, para. 32)

It is known that several of the attendees and other faith leaders have had regular access to Trump since his candidacy, the White House front door being described by one pastor as "open to Evangelicals" (Weiland, 2018). Although the precise nature of these conversations is not known, this research indicates that their words, perhaps just in a generic sense, are the words that Trump realizes a core constituency must hear. One of the most important items on the wish list of the White Evangelical community was installing Supreme Court justices sympathetic to their agenda. It is perhaps telling that Hughes (2019) found that, of the 448 speeches examined, the speech with the second highest rate of religious language was when Donald Trump introduced Neil Gorsuch as his Supreme Court nominee.

The concluding thanks in the address to pastors makes it sound like a deal between the two parties was struck at some point. It is possible to turn to a useful guide called *The Art of the Deal* to help understand deal making. In that book, author Donald Trump (Trump & Schwartz, 2015, p. 335) writes, "Deals work best when each side gets something it wants from the other." The Evangelical leaders,[9] and many of their constituents, had a list that included recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, "prolife" justices on the Supreme Court, a repeal of the Johnson amendment,[10] increased protections on religious "freedom," and rollbacks of LGBT+ rights. Trump has largely delivered on much of this wish list. Sixty percent of White Evangelicals want the United States to be a primarily Christian country (Najle & Jones, 2019); in Trump, they have perhaps also found support, linguistically at least, of that vision, "America First" and "God First" coalescing into Christian nationalism. In turn, Trump wanted the presidency and subsequent support for that presidency. Evangelical leaders, in their support, helped their communities interpret Trump's actions charitably. His public communications also helped these leaders in their work.

It is perhaps the case that the use of religious language in the texts here examined is not employed strategically, but rather is just a reflection of the authors' beliefs. Perhaps the change in the rate of usage of religious language in public communications between Citizen Trump, Candidate Trump, and President Trump reflects changing personal beliefs; perhaps the "baby Christian" is developing. Or perhaps the dealmaker was helped to realize the importance of using such language to achieve his goals. These findings may be a product of the increasing realization of the importance of religion to Trump personally, or it may be that they are a product of the increasing realization of the importance of religion and the religious to Trump politically.

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[9] It is apposite to acknowledge that this section and such references in the rest of the article do not refer to all leaders in the White Evangelical community. Many in this community vehemently oppose parts of this agenda and/or presidency.

[10] The Johnson amendment, signed by then-Senator Lyndon Johnson in 1954, bars tax-exempt nonprofits such as churches from participating in political campaigns. Trump promised to "totally destroy" it at the National Prayer Breakfast in February 2017 (Weiland, 2018).

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Appendix

Table A1. List of Faith Terms and God Terms.

Faith terms				
amen	creed*	miracle*	redemption	sin
angel	crusade*	mission*	religio*	sins
angels	denomination*	orthodox*	repent*	sinner
angelic*	devotion	parable*	restor*	sinners
apostle*	devout	pastor*	resurrect*	sinning
backslid*	disciple*	peacemaker*	reverend*	sinned
baptism*	epistle*	penance	sabbath	solemn*
baptize	evil*	piety	sacrament	soul*
believer*	faith*	pious	sacred	sow
bible*	fellowship*	pope*	saint*	sows
biblical	fruits	pray*	salvation	sown
bless*	genesis	priest*	sanctity	sowed
cathedral*	gospel*	prophe*	sanctify	spirit*
christian*	grace	proverb*	sanctuary*	temple*
church	hallow*	psalm*	scriptur*	testament
churches	heaven*	pulpit*	sermon*	theolog*
clergy	holy	rabbi*	servant*	trinity
commandment*	hymn*	reap	shrine*	worship*
communion	immortal*	rebirth	repent*	
confession*	jew*	reborn	restor*	
congregation*	lamp	redeem*	resurrect*	
consecrat*	martyr*			
covenant				
God terms				
Almighty	Christ	Creator	God	Lord
He±	Him±	His±	Supreme Being	

*All possible endings of that stem under the same lexeme.

±Only when clearly a reference to God, usually capitalized midsentence following another God term.

Table A2. Religiosity of States by Quartiles.

Quartile 1 (number of speeches = 18)	Quartile 2 (*n* = 47)	Quartile 3 (*n* = 30)	Quartile 4 (*n* = 31)
1=. Alabama	13. Kentucky	27=. **Arizona**	39=. Montana
1=. **Mississippi**	14. **Virginia**	27=. District of Columbia	39=. Oregon
3. Tennessee	15. Missouri	27=. **Michigan**	41=. **Colorado**
4. Louisiana	16. South Dakota	27=. North Dakota	41=. Hawaii
5=. Arkansas	17. **Ohio**	27=. **Pennsylvania**	43. New York
5=. South Carolina	18. **New Mexico**	32. Delaware	44=. Alaska
7. West Virginia	19=. **Iowa**	33=. Idaho	44=. **Washington**
8=. Georgia	19=. Kansas	33=. Illinois	44=. **Wisconsin**
8=. Oklahoma	19=. New Jersey	35=. California	47. **Connecticut**
10. **North Carolina**	22=. **Florida**	35=. **Minnesota**	48=. **Maine**
11=. **Texas**	22=. Indiana	35=. **Nevada**	48=. Vermont
11=. Utah	22=. Maryland	35=. Rhode Island	50=. Massachusetts
	22=. Nebraska		50=. **New Hampshire**
	22=. Wyoming		

Note. States in bold type indicate states in which speeches were delivered. Only nominee rally speeches are included. States with the same ordinal number had the same level of average personal religiosity in the Pew survey.